

HELP IN THE CONTROL OF INVASIVE GYPSY MOTHS

Gypsy moths typically defoliate trees in mid-June. All leaves on an oak tree can be eaten within a week. Most trees can grow a replacement set of leaves by late July, and the forest will be green again, but this is very stressful for a tree and can kill the buds, twigs and/or branches. After that, tree growth slows down for several years and the tree can be attacked by other forest insects and diseases. Trees weakened by defoliation will also stop making nuts, sometimes for years, and wildlife lose out on a food source that they depend on. While the trees are bare, predators can easily find nests and songbirds may lose their young. Lack of shade from the tree makes water temperatures warmer, which lowers the amount of oxygen in the water for aquatic plants and animals. A dense canopy of leaves also buffers the violence of summer storms. When that protection is lost, rainwater erodes the soil and lowers water quality in streams. Fish and other aquatic animals can be stressed during this period before trees "releaf." Gypsy moth caterpillars can also be a nuisance around homes as they feed on trees in homeowners' yards.

Homeowners and landowners can take a number of steps to reduce the number of gypsy moth caterpillars without using pesticides:

Search out and destroy egg masses once leaves fall in October:

- Egg masses, 1-1 1/2 inches long and shaped like a teardrop, are buffy tan and look like felt.
- They are found in protected spots, often in cracks in rough bark or under loose bark, but also under signs, in rock or firewood piles, on manmade objects like vehicles, picnic tables or playground equipment.
- Use a knife to scrape the egg mass off into a jar and destroy the egg masses by placing the jar into a microwave for a minute or by covering the eggs with a 50/50 mixture of soybean oil and water.
- Dispose of the eggs and the jar in the trash. Avoid directly handling the egg masses as the hairs that cover them can be irritating.
- If you can't scrape the egg masses off cleanly, use a spray bottle to treat them with a horticultural oil which lists gypsy moth eggs such as Golden Pest Spray Oil, a soybean oil-based insecticide which coats and suffocates the eggs.

Place a band of sticky material around your yard trees before mid-May when the bark is dry to prevent caterpillars from climbing up the trunks to feed:

- Wrap duct tape around the tree, shiny side out, at chest height, and several inches wide
- Smear a sticky horticultural barrier such as Tanglefoot or petroleum jelly along the band's center, leaving 2 inches of tape clear if you use petroleum jelly. Never use automotive greases, they can kill trees!
- Periodically check the bands to make sure they aren't clogged with trapped insects, dirt or debris - apply more sticky material as needed.
- Replace barrier bands with burlap collection bands in June or take the bands down in late July when gypsy moth caterpillars have pupated.

Place burlap collection bands around your trees in mid-June so gypsy moth caterpillars will accumulate under them and you can collect and kill large numbers of larvae.

- Wrap the strip of 12- to 18-inch wide burlap around the trunk above the sticky band if you have one in place
- Tie a string around the center of the burlap band and allow the top 6 inches to flop over to make a two layered skirt
- Check the burlap bands daily from mid-afternoon to 6 p.m. and collect all caterpillars, pupae, adults and egg masses, using gloves or forceps because the caterpillar hairs can be very irritating to human skin
- Kill caterpillars by placing them in cup of soapy water (dishwashing detergent works well), then drain off the water and throw the caterpillars in the trash
- Take the burlap bands down in August

For more information on the biology, ecology and management of gypsy moth go to:
<http://gypsymoth.wi.gov/> or call 1-800-642-MOTH.